

A TANK AWAY

# High grade for Middletown, Conn.

By Ellen Albanese | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 06, 2013



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**Wide and old-fashioned, Main Street in Middletown, Conn., runs along the Connecticut River.**

College towns always seem to have a little extra cachet, and Middletown, home of Wesleyan University, is no exception. A wide, old-fashioned Main Street, complete with retro angle parking, runs through the center of town, along the Connecticut River.

On the other side, just up the hill, the handsome buildings of the university sit on a 340-acre campus. Couples and families will find good food (more than 30 restaurants downtown), a vibrant arts scene, and kid-friendly attractions such as a children's museum and a zip-line course.

STAY

Built in 1810 as a grand residence for the president of Middletown National Bank and later transformed into a National Guard Armory, the **Inn at Middletown** (70 Main St., 860-854-6300, [www.innatmiddletown.com](http://www.innatmiddletown.com), \$169-\$279) offers 100 guest rooms and suites, some with views of the Connecticut River. Close to all the area's attractions, the inn also has a heated indoor pool.

Find budget lodging at **Passport Inn & Suites** (1310 South Main St., 860-346-7701, \$59-\$69). Rooms include a microwave, refrigerator, and free Wi-Fi.

## DINE

There's usually a line in front of **O'Rourke's Diner** (728 Main St., 860-346-6101, [www.orourkesmiddletown.com](http://www.orourkesmiddletown.com), all-day breakfast \$2.49-\$13.49, lunch \$1.95-\$11.95), known for its omelets, Reubens, homemade breads, and steamed cheeseburgers. The burgers are topped with aged cheddar and steamed in a box, our waitress explained, which allows the fat to drip away but keeps them moist. We had ours with crispy fries and tangy coleslaw.

For fine dining try **Luce Restaurant** (98 Washington St., 860-344-0222, [www.lucect.com](http://www.lucect.com), lunch \$7.50-\$21, dinner \$17-\$32) in a charming old building that used to be an automobile showroom. Its exposed brick, tin ceiling, and two-sided fireplace make for a cozy dining room. Steaks and fresh seafood — such as Dover sole, Arctic char, monkfish — are the specialties.

With its large menu, **Amici Italian Grill** (280 Main St., 860-346-0075, [www.amiciitaliangrill.com](http://www.amiciitaliangrill.com), entrees \$13-\$25) offers something for everyone, from gluten-free pasta to steak to seafood. Bolognese sauce and seafood fra diavolo are customer favorites, the hostess said.

You'll never think of cupcakes in quite the same way after a visit to **NoRA Cupcake Co.** (700 Main St., 860-788-3150, [www.noracupcake.com](http://www.noracupcake.com)). The signature flavor is Irish Car Bomb, a Guinness-infused chocolate cake filled with a Jameson-laced dark chocolate ganache and topped with a Bailey's Irish Cream-spiked frosting. Fat Elvis is a fluff-filled



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**O'Rourke's Diner is a Middletown landmark, with long lines, all-day breakfast, and a candy shop chocolate named after it.**

banana cupcake with peanut butter cream cheese frosting, rolled in candied bacon. The “cupcakery” is tucked into an old building with a pressed tin ceiling, Victorian furniture, and a fireplace. (NoRA is an acronym for North of Rapallo Avenue.)

## DURING THE DAY

Wesleyan University has three galleries open to the public free of charge ([www.wesleyan.edu/cfa/galleries.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa/galleries.html)). Middletown public school students will show their work at the **Zilkha Gallery** (283 Washington Terrace) March 9-17, followed by thesis exhibitions by seniors in the Department of Art and Art History’s Studio Program. The **Davison Arts Center** (301 High St.) will feature modern protest posters in an exhibition opening April 5. “Traces of Life: Seen Through Korean Eyes, 1945-1992” continues through May 26 at the **Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies Gallery** (343 Washington Terrace).

Children can climb aboard a clipper ship, take a Space Age road trip, or put on a puppet show at **Kidcity Children’s Museum** (119 Washington St., 860-347-0495, [www.kidcitymuseum.com](http://www.kidcitymuseum.com), admission \$8, under age 1 free). Designed for children up to 8 years old, the museum occupies a two-story house with lots of rooms, hallways, and intriguing nooks and crannies.

Adventure-seeking families and adults can take a zip-line canopy tour at **Empower Leadership Sports & Adventure Center** (2011 South Main St., 860-638-4754, [www.leadershipsports.com](http://www.leadershipsports.com), \$49 per person, late March-November). The basic tour takes 1½-2 hours and can be combined with tree climbing and scavenger hunts on the company’s 25-acre site.

Satisfy your sweet tooth at **Tschudin Chocolates & Confections** (100 Riverview Center, 860 -759-2222, [www.tschocolates.com](http://www.tschocolates.com)), where many of the truffles are named for downtown eateries; the O’Rourke is flavored with Bailey’s Irish Cream and topped with white chocolate vermicelli. Tours and tastings are available for \$50 per person.

## AFTER DARK

The **Center for the Arts at Wesleyan University** (283 Washington Terrace, 860-685-3355, [www.wesleyan.edu/cfa](http://www.wesleyan.edu/cfa)) presents music, dance, and theater performances, many of which are free. Upcoming events include the Wesleyan Jazz Orchestra April 18 and 20 (free) and Hugh Masakela April 19 (\$6-\$25).

The **Oddfellows Playhouse** (128 Washington St., 860-347-6143, [www.oddfellows.org](http://www.oddfellows.org)) is a youth theater and performing arts program that offers classes, workshops, theater, and special events, including a summer circus. Next up: “Alice Threw the Looking Glass,” April 4-6, a parody of Lewis Carroll’s classic and Strunk and White’s “The Elements of Style.” Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors.

The **Buttonwood Tree Performing Arts & Cultural Center** (605 Main St., 860-347-4957, [www.buttonwood.org](http://www.buttonwood.org)) usually has live music on Friday and Saturday nights, in addition to a diverse calendar of entertainment, lectures, and classes.

**Metro Movies 12** (140 Main St., 860-346-4000, [www.rctheatres.com/loc\\_middletown.asp](http://www.rctheatres.com/loc_middletown.asp)) is a 12-screen theater that shows first-run releases and independent films.

There are lots of open skating times at **Middletown Roller Skating Rink** (547 Main St., 860-704-0064, [www.middletownrink.com](http://www.middletownrink.com)), an old-time amusement venue that seems right at home on Main Street.

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